

**PROBLEM-SOLVING PERFORMANCE OF EDUCATIONAL  
LEADERS IN ENHANCING THE CULTURE OF TEACHING AND  
LEARNING IN THABONG SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

Presented by

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## DEDICATION

**TO** My parents, David and Cornelia Nkonoane. I am very grateful to you for always being there for me. In dedicating this dissertation to you I will always remember you for instilling in me the love for knowledge, patience, and respect for others.

My wife, Kelebogile, thank you for inspiring and encouraging me to become a better person!

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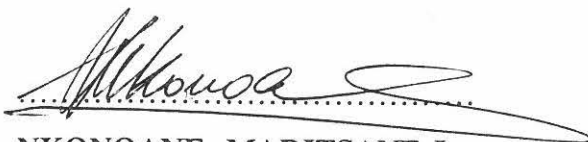
**TO** my colleagues who inspired and encouraged me throughout  
all the principals who were willing to participate in this study  
all my friends who were supportive and encouraging  
the Vista Welkom Campus Library Staff for assistance in providing space and resources  
for collection of information for this study. Thanks Mrs van Zyl and staff!

## DECLARATION

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- \* is my own work
- \* that all the sources quoted have been acknowledged by means of references, and that
- \* this Mini-Dissertation was never previously submitted to any university for degree purposes



NKONOANE, MADITSANE, J



## ABSTRACT

- a) **TITLE:** Problem -Solving Performance of Educational Leaders in Enhancing the Culture of Teaching and Learning in Thabong Secondary Schools
- b) **STUDENT:** Nkonoane, M. J.
- c) **DEGREE:** M.Ed (CW)
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- g) **SUMMARY**

The purpose of this research was to investigate problem-solving performance of educational leaders (principals) in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning in Thabong secondary schools. The main objective of the study was to investigate ways in which school managers can be assisted in the development of requisite problem-solving skills from which schools will benefit. The study further sought to contribute to the body of knowledge regarding school improvement and effectiveness.

Data were collected from a sample of principals in Thabong secondary schools. The Free Attitude Interview was used as a data collection instrument. The results of the study have revealed the need

for capacity building among school managers. Problems experienced by principals ranged from lack of resources to low motivational levels on the part of teachers, learners, and parents. Capacity -building programmes have a potential of imbuing school managers with the necessary organizational skills .

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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A review of literature indicates that much greater attention needs to be given to the conceptualization of educational leadership, which, according to Immegart (1988), is attention that acknowledges the multidimensional nature of leadership. School principalship is a vital position which necessitates such attention. The position involves taking on certain requisite duties and challenges; which make the role to be fast-paced, involving significant amounts of interpersonal contact, of which more is unplanned than planned. Moreover principalship has become a socially constructed role, the expectations for which have changed dramatically since its inception. These expectations include among others, the need to develop expert problem-solving skills in order to enhance the culture of teaching and learning.

Problem-solving as a conception of leadership encompasses dispositions and orientations toward leadership. It reinforces the continued importance of managerial expertise of educational leaders. It is against this background that “ *Problem -Solving Performance of Educational Leaders in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning in Thabong Secondary Schools* ” is studied. The intent of the study is to suggest capacity-building programmes, especially for novice principals. Thus, chapter one will primarily focus on the afore-mentioned outline by highlighting the following: background of the problem, focusing on past and current efforts to re-establish the culture of teaching and learning; statement of the problem; purpose of the study; delineation of the research problem; and scope of the study. Subsequent chapters will pursue a research agenda on problem-solving processes of educational leaders.

## 1.2 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The South African education system is currently trying to re-establish the culture of teaching and learning in schools. Secondary schools are fraught with behavioural problems among educators and learners. Curricular programmes at universities are stalled by students demanding peripheral issues to teaching and learning interaction to be resolved first. The culmination of this discordant is a comprehensive disruption of these institutions epitomised by protests, strikes, sit-ins and demonstrations. Concomitant with this unsavoury scenario, is the dearth of quality teaching and learning.

Efforts at bringing about effective change, improvement, and quality in the culture of teaching and learning in schools are the prerogative of all and sundry, but particularly the school managers. In the light of the foregoing, this study seeks to explore the extent to which problem-solving strategies of school managers can hamper or promote the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning. An understanding of problem-solving as part of the leadership process will contribute towards developing a more lucid conception of school leadership and thereby equipping school managers with more effective school improvement skills.

## 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

School managers are primarily assessed, *inter-alia*, against the backdrop of how effective they are in cultivating the culture of teaching and learning. Regardless of the extent of their effectiveness, recent ubiquitous outcries and exhortations to redeem the plummeting culture of teaching and learning are indicative of their inherent limitations at problem-solving techniques to render the schools viable. This study is intended toward contributing to school improvement, upliftment of the standards of learning, and enhancement of the quality of teaching.

The research questions posed are:

- ❶ To what extent do problem-solving strategies currently implemented by school managers enhance the culture of teaching and learning?
- ❷ How can secondary school managers be better equipped with problem-solving skills from which the schools will benefit?
- ❸ How can problem-solving skills of secondary school managers enhance the culture of teaching and learning?

## 1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The aim of this study is to highlight and investigate problem-solving approaches implemented by school managers and to establish which of these approaches enhance teaching and learning. This ultimate aim can be achieved through addressing primary objectives such as:

- ❶ Identifying common problem-solving issues encountered by principals on a daily basis e.g lack of discipline among educators and learners.
- ❷ Describing different approaches to managerial problem-solving.
- ❸ Identifying the changing role of the school manager as instructional leader
- ❹ Investigating the principals' capacity to manage change
- ❺ Investigating the advantages of promoting capacity building programmes such as the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) approach for school managers

Finally, in pursuing the above-mentioned objectives as part of the research agenda to investigate problem-solving processes of school managers, this study will help to identify the practices of expert, transformational leaders that will enlighten preparation practices for future school managers and thereby contribute towards a research focus on problem-solving as part of educational leadership process.



## 1.5 THEORETICAL RATIONALE

The focus on problem-solving has been driven largely by the perceived correlation between high quality management and effective schools as the necessary ingredients for the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning. Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) have been pursuing a systematic research agenda to investigate problem-solving processes of educational leaders at different levels and different situations. Their research on problem-solving processes of educational leaders derives from the information-processing paradigm of cognitive psychology. According to Corrigan in Leithwood and Steinbach (1995), the ultimate goal of research is to identify the practices of expert “transformational” leaders that will enlighten preparation practices for future educational leaders.

Leithwood, Begley and Cousins (1992) argue that problem-solving is a productive conception of leadership because, as a generic human function, problem-solving is capable of helping unearth the roots of otherwise puzzling human activity. This conception includes efforts to understand the situational nature of leadership; that is, the extent to which particular leadership styles depend as far as effects are concerned on the context in which leadership is exercised. The central skill of situational leaders is to decide and choose from their repertoires, responses that are called for by circumstances ( Leithwood *et al.* 1992: 9).

Research reviewed by Leithwood *et al* (1990) has begun to generate information required to explain substantial variation in educational leaders` impact on schools. Taking contemporary cognitive science theory as a point of departure, research conducted by Leithwood *et al* (1993), investigated different problem-solving processes of “expert” and “typical” educational leaders. Among the most significant results of this research is a model of educational leaders` problem-solving, consisting of constructs such as interpretation, goals, principles/values, constraints, solution processes, and affect; which were used as a guide for data collection along with research findings about expert- typical differences related to each of them.

Rowan (1990) notes that the inclusion of cognitive perspectives on learning and teaching must be a critical part of any educational leadership preparation programme. The emphasis must be on establishing direct linkages and interconnections between cognitive perspectives on learning and leadership practice. Prestine in Leithwood & Steinbach(1995) asserts that these interconnections must especially emphasize the reciprocal relationship between cognition and leadership - how cognitive understandings of learning and teaching inform and shape leadership practice and how educational leadership can further and support cognitive-based curricular and instructional practices.

Prestine in Leithwood & Steinbach (1995) further argues that school leadership will have to be reconceptualized from a cognitive perspective and based on cognitive learning precepts just as understandings of classroom learning and teaching are. This implies that the basic tenets of cognitive-based learning will be equally applicable to the organization and governance of schools as to the areas of curriculum, instruction and assessment. It is therefore imperative for educational leaders to have understandings of cognitive precepts in order to provide an organizational setting that is conducive and supportive of the enhancement of the culture of teaching and learning. It is within this context that this study seeks to explore the extent to which problem-solving practices of school managers can hamper or promote the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning in Thabong secondary schools.

## **1.6 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

For the purpose of this study, the term *educational leader* will be used to mean principal/ school manager, and the masculine pronoun *he* will be used not to denote gender bias, but for convenience. The following concepts are defined within the context of the study to be undertaken:

### **1.6.1 Problem-Solving**

Van den Aardweg (1988) regards problem-solving as the highest form of learning involving



thought. It enables the person to secure new ideas independently. In the context of educational leadership, this process requires flexibility, originality, and divergent thinking to solve divergent and variegated educational problems which too often are sporadic even under the most seemingly ethereal circumstances.

### **1.6.2 Educational Management**

Educational management comprises those regulative tasks executed by a person or body in the position of authority so as to allow formative education to take place( Van der Westhuizen 1991:55).

## **1.7 METHODOLOGY**

The research design is qualitative and the method used is the descriptive method complemented by a survey method. Qualitative research describes and analyzes people`s individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions (McMillan & Schumacher 1993: 372). Descriptive research studies are designed to obtain information concerning the current status of phenomena. They are directed toward determining the nature of a situation as it exists at the time of the study (Ary *et al*, 1990:381). The study lends itself to such an approach because it seeks to describe the problem-solving process as part of educational leadership. The descriptive survey which will be used to complement descriptive research will focus on determining the status of a defined population (educational leaders) with respect to problem-solving and decision making, as independent variables.

A small scale survey will be conducted by using the Free Attitude Interview (FAI)to elicit information from the identified population i.e secondary school principals. The Free Attitude Interview Technique is described as a non-directive controlled depth interview which can be used as a qualitative research interview (Meulenberg-Buskens 1997: 1). As this study is of a small scale survey, non-probability sampling will be used whereby four(4) out of nine (9) secondary



school principals- who are conveniently available for the study- will be interviewed.

## **1.8 SCOPE AND DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY**

The study will focus primarily on problem-solving as a process of educational leadership with special reference to the performance of educational leaders in Thabong secondary schools representing the geographical delimitation of the study. This will help highlight problem-solving issues regarding the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning. Through review of literature, the study will unpack and interrogate a full range of intellectual and emotional activity which constitutes problem-solving in order to appreciate responses of school managers to problem-solving issues. Finally the study will further suggest a problem-centred approach in developing capacity of school managers.

## **1.8 COURSE OF STUDY**

In Chapter 1 the focus is on introduction, problem formulation, definition of terms, methodology, and delimitation of the study. The rest of the study comprises a research agenda on problem-solving processes of school managers with the focus in Chapter 2 on problem-solving as component of educational leadership process. Chapter 3 contains a detailed discussion of methodology to be adopted as well as data collection techniques, and Chapter 4 contains analysis of data collected on problem-solving processes of school managers. Finally in Chapter 5 recommendations are made especially around the need for capacity-building for school managers, and thereby highlighting criteria by which school managers can be judged as effective or not effective or alternatively as expert or novice. A literature review on problem-solving as component of educational leadership process follows in Chapter 2.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

# **LITERATURE REVIEW- PROBLEM-SOLVING AS PART OF THE EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP PROCESS**

## **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

In pursuing the goal of the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning, secondary school managers have had to grapple with a number of impediments which require problem-solving skills. Such skills draw heavily on dispositions and orientations towards leadership, which may either be novice or expert. Schools and school managers are often described as effective without explaining the criteria for judging effectiveness.

This chapter attempts to discuss some perspectives from which school effectiveness can be perceived. Emphasis will be on problem solving as part of the educational leadership process. This will be done through a literature review. An overview of the following will be undertaken: school improvement and effectiveness (cf.2.2) the current state of school leadership (cf.2.3) perspectives on problem-solving and school leadership (cf.2.4), managerial problem-solving (cf.2.4.1), problem-based learning approach (cf.2.4.2) school leadership and cognitive apprenticeship (cf.2.5), and principals' strategies and teachers' instructional performance (cf.2.6).

## **2.2 SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS**

Concern with the quality of the teaching-learning process, increasing devolution of responsibility and accountability to the school level, a more diverse client base, and ever increasing pressure on

schools to educate and prepare students for the world and jobs of tomorrow, dominate the attention of educators worldwide. Effective schools` research provides a context for discussion about the options and directions available to those responsible for the management of schools. Campbell-Evans in Dimmock (1995: 94) states that while the primary concern of the classroom teacher continues to focus on the teaching and learning process, the school principal must expend energy on school level issues which have consequences for classroom and school level practice.

Treffinger (1995) defines school improvement as the deliberate or systematic efforts made by any school or school district to define, work toward, and sustain excellence. School improvement is concerned with applying the principles and practices of continuous improvement, learning, commitment to quality, and innovation to the schools` efforts to bring out the best in everyone (staff and administration, students, parents and community). Over the past few decades, several studies were launched to identify characteristics of effective schools, i.e., schools that were producing greater student learning than other schools, often schools with similar student and community demographics. Edmonds (1982) identified five key characteristics of effective schools:

- ❶ Clear school goals focused on academics, and a pervasive and broadly understood instructional focus with a common curriculum for all students
- ❷ Principal leadership focused on the instructional programme
- ❸ High teacher expectations for all students to achieve at least minimum mastery of the school`s instructional programme
- ❹ Frequent monitoring of student performance and use of measures of student achievement as the basis of programme evaluation
- ❺ A safe and orderly climate to teaching and learning.

Edmonds` research (1982) showed that schools could make the difference, and that more effective schools had clear academic goals, held high expectations for all learners, and offered a common curriculum programme for all learners. Such schools were led by principals who focussed



activities and resources on the curriculum and instructional programme, and provided a safe and orderly environment.

Odden (1995: 175) states that according to the new logic of organizing in the private sector, a high performing school would be:

- ① A learning organization
- ② Attentive to global imperatives for high student performance
- ③ Thinking big and acting small
- ④ Replacing functional organization with teams of teachers working with cohorts of children
- ⑤ attentive to school customers: children, parents, higher level education institutions, and labour market
- ⑥ Focusing on curriculum and instruction, and outsourcing some functions
- ⑦ Organizing through teams and controlling through high involvement. High involvement would include decentralizing information, knowledge, power, and rewards.

Odden (1995: 176) further argues that through high involvement management, teachers must be more involved in running and managing schools and be accountable for results. The devolution of power and knowledge at the school level offers the potential of transforming schools into high-performance entities.

In a review of literature on school effectiveness and leadership, Leithwood *et al* (1990) argue that results of research concerned with school effectiveness and school improvement have consistently ascribed importance to school leadership. Their synthesis reveals the following:

- ① **Impact:** that school leaders are capable of having a significant influence on the basic skills achievement of students. In addition, that school leaders are capable of influencing teachers' adoption and use of innovative classroom practices and

teachers' job satisfaction.

- ② ***Practices:*** with respect to goals, highly effective school leaders have been found to demonstrate high levels of commitment to goals for the school, especially instructional goals. Such leaders articulate an overall multifaceted vision for the school. Effective leaders, the research reveals, set relatively high professional standards for goal achievement and actively work towards the development of widespread agreement concerning such standards. The research thus confirms the central role of goals- their nature, sources and use- in explaining effective practice on the part of school leaders. It has been found that participatory decision-making is used selectively but frequently by effective school leaders depending on their assessment of the context
- ③ ***Influences on practices:*** Obstacles standing in the way of school leaders providing instructional leadership are often raised by teachers in the schools (for example, lack of knowledge about new practices, lack of motivation to change, uneven professional development); and constraints on programme decision-making arising from collective bargaining and union contracts.

Duke (1990: 25) suggests that some principals are more effective than others because they have a better sense of what to do - and what not to do. Those who have vision are able to prioritize their use of time and are in a position to know which things to leave undone. School effectiveness research has focused on the differences between schools in an attempt to uncover key elements of effective practice. This body of research seeks in general to unlock the secrets of effectiveness in terms of what difference teachers and administrators can make to students' experience of, and success in, school.

In Holmes and Wynne's (1989: 256) view, the school effectiveness research assumes that primacy is to be given to academic work, or perhaps in a few cases, to academic work and character development. They suggest that one possible explanation of the effective schools'

research is that effective schools are those where the principal and teachers subscribe to the value of the criteria attested to by effective school research. According to Campbell-Evans in Dimmock (1995: 93), those criteria common across a high number of studies include: high expectations, a focus on learning, effective use of time, professional development of staff, safe and orderly environment, use of consistent discipline, regular monitoring of achievement, rewards for performance, involvement of the community and strong leadership.

Finally, concern regarding the effectiveness of schooling, the quality of education, the relationship between education and international economic competitiveness, continuing financial stringency and competing community and social demands for public funds, have forced educational authorities in most countries to reassess the goals, provision and assessment of education in schools and school systems. In most countries consideration of ways to improve the effectiveness of schools has tended to be based around policies or rationalized budget allocations and accountability.

According to Chapman (1991), in most instances the concern has been - if not how to achieve effectiveness at a lower cost - at least how to achieve effectiveness in the most cost efficient manner. The current call for the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning in South African schools coupled with restructuring efforts which include teacher redeployment suggests that there is a move towards providing effective education in a cost efficient manner. However, an understanding of the current state of school leadership remains a pre-requisite to effective school improvement.

## **2.3 THE CURRENT STATE OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

Formal school leadership is a socially constructed role, the expectations of which have changed dramatically since its inception. Expectations have changed at a sufficiently rapid rate to create incompetence among some of those with long tenure in the role. At some point in their careers,



the performance of these people matched the socially determined expectations for exemplary school leadership. But the social ground shifted from under them and they did not shift with it ( Leithwood *et al.* 1992: 11).

A brief scrutiny of current state of school leadership through research suggests inadequacy among school leaders to meet present and future expectations. Partially in response to this inherent limitation, a number of researchers (e.g Leithwood, Begley, & Cousins, 1992) have shifted their attention theories to human cognition as a better way of explaining the nature of expert leadership and justifying particular organizational configurations. Prestine in Begley (1995) further argues that school leadership will have to be reconceptualized from a cognitive perspective and based on cognitive learning precepts to enable school managers to become effective instructional leaders.

Hallinger and Heck (1996) indicate that recent studies define the role of the principal more broadly, using constructs such as transformational leadership, participative leadership, and the decentralization of decision making. Leithwood (1995) has linked principals' transformational leadership to measures of improvement in teachers' classroom behaviours, attitudes and effectiveness(i.e student achievement).

Thus, this study seeks to discuss a cognitively focused approach to supporting the acquisition of school leadership skills, with special reference to problem-solving. It is against this background that this study will review the effectiveness of the problem-solving strategies used by school managers in Thabong secondary schools and determine how their general problem-solving performance can be enhanced.

## **2.4 PROBLEM-SOLVING AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

What principals do depends on what they think. Leithwood & Steinbach (1995) explain that the patterns of practice used for school improvement are products of how principals think about and approach not just the overall problem of school improvement but also the multitude of smaller, imbedded sub-problems. Schwenk (1988) points out that systematic research has begun to be

devoted to the thinking and problem-solving patterns of educational leaders; and that accumulated evidence is quite small due to the fact that more research has been reported on the problem-solving and strategic thinking of managers and leaders from non-educational organizations. Without a better understanding of educational leaders' thinking and problem-solving, it is difficult to implement successful and effective intervention measures geared towards assisting them (educational leaders) to be more effective in their practice.

#### 2.4.1 Leithwood & Steinbach's (1995) Problem- Solving Model

Leithwood and Steinbach (1995) pursued a research agenda on principals' thinking and problem-solving by taking contemporary cognitive science theory as a point of departure. Among the most significant results of their research is a model of educational administrators' problem-solving consisting of six constructs defined as follows:

- ① **Interpretation:** a principal's understanding of what is specifically the nature of the problem, often in situations where multiple problems may be identified;
- ② **Goals:** the relative immediate purposes that the principal is attempting to achieve in response to his interpretation of the problem;
- ③ **Principles/values:** the relatively long-term purposes, operating principles, fundamental laws, doctrines, values and assumptions guiding the principal's thinking;
- ④ **Constraints:** barriers or obstacles which must be overcome if an acceptable solution to the problem is to be found;
- ⑤ **Solution processes:** what the principal does to solve a problem in light of his interpretation of the problem, principles, goals to be achieved and constraints to be accommodated;
- ⑥ **Affect:** the feelings, mood and self confidence the principal experiences when involved in problem-solving.



These constructs were used as a guide for data collection and provided an initial structure for coding and data analysis. The researchers concluded that variations in patterns of practice can be explained by differences in problem-solving processes whereby problem interpretation depends largely on how knowledgeable the principal considered himself to be with instructional practice. Thus subsequent research would do well to attend to the role of domain-specific knowledge in educational leaders' problem-solving. However, an understanding of the current state of school leadership remains a pre-requisite to developing an understanding of problem-solving processes of current educational leaders. This then leads to a discussion of managerial problem-solving.

### **2.4.2 Managerial Problem-Solving**

Mumford *et al* (2000) state that leadership represents a a complex form of problem solving in that leadership problems differ from more routine problems due to the complexity, conflict, and change characterizing organizations which ensure that leaders are presented with ill-defined problems. Wagner & Carter (1991) have distinguished between *academic and practical problems*. This distinction revolves around the fact that academic problems are well-defined and formulated, while practical problems require additional information.

According to Mumford *et al* (200), solving these problems depends on a complex set of skills and the availability of requisite knowledge. They further argue that the skills needed to solve organizational leadership problems include complex creative problem-solving skills associated with identifying problems, understanding the problem, and generating potential solutions, social judgement skills associated with the refinement of potential solutions and the creation of implementation frameworks within a complex organizational setting; and social skills associated with motivating and directing others during solution implementation.

Wagner (1991) argues that this distinction is manifested in differing views about the nature of managerial problem-solving. Wagner & Carter (1991) further explain that the field of management is split into two, between those who view managers as rational technicians whose job is to apply

principles of management science to the workplace, and those who view managers as craftspersons who practice an art that is not reducible into scientific principles. Rational approaches to problem can be applied to problems regardless of context. They are based on sound principles of logic and scientific reasoning. However, the challenge faced by rational approaches comes from studies of what managers do, as opposed to what they say they do or what they are supposed to do (Wagner & Carter, 1991: 452).

The approaches to the study of the art of managerial problem solving are similar to rational approaches in that both kinds of approaches represent analytic attempts to describe problem-solving in terms of a set of generalizations (Wagner & Carter, 1991: 468). Although it is possible to initiate action once the problem is identified using any of the two approaches, problem-solving still remains the product of a drawn out convoluted process that involves a number of individuals and parts of an organization (McCall & Kaplan, 1985). One response to the discrepancy between problem solving as described in textbooks and as it occurs in the context of real organizations has been the adoption of the case method to managerial training. Wagner & Carter (1991) explain that the case method emphasizes understanding the situational context of a problem. By requiring students to recommend action in response to the case problem, analysis is constrained much as in actual business situations (Christensen, 1987).

Leadership has traditionally been seen as a distinctly interpersonal phenomenon demonstrated in the interactions between leaders and subordinates. According to Mumford *et al* (2000), effective leadership behaviour fundamentally depends upon the leader's ability to solve the kinds of complex social problems that arise in organizations. They further argue that leadership can be framed not in terms of specific behaviours as suggested by theories of behavioural styles (Lindell & Rosenqvist, 1992), transformational or charismatic leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1994); but instead in terms of the capabilities, knowledge, and skills that make effective leadership possible. The leader's performance is further described as a function of whether he can identify goals, construct viable goal paths, and direct others along these paths in a volatile, socio-technical environment (Mumford & Connelly, (1991).



Leaders are expected to circumvent or resolve issues impeding progress towards accomplishing organizational goals. Mumford *et al* (2000) stipulate that selection and implementation of actions to bring about goal attainment represents a form of problem solving making the generation, evaluation, and implementation of proactive and reactive solutions key to leader effectiveness. Notwithstanding the fact that leadership is an interactional social phenomenon involving the exercise of influence and others' reactions to these influence attempts, Mumford *et al* (2000) argue that effective leaders must exercise influence judiciously, tackling the right problems in the right way within the context of other organizational activities. Thus, problem-focused and organizationally focused cognition represent necessary precursors to the effective exercise of influence.

The skills-based approach to organizational leadership, and managerial problem-solving is cognisant of the fact that knowledge and skills grow as a function of experience as leaders progress through their careers. However, learning still remains the pre-requisite to the acquisition of requisite skills and knowledge to problem-solving, and thus the following is a discussion of the Problem-Based Learning Approach.

### **2.4.3 Problem-Based Learning Approach**

In acknowledging the shortcomings of various educational leadership preparation programmes at Masters degree level, Dimmock & Edwards (1996) proposed the implementation of a problem-based learning (PBL) approach for a unit in a specialised master's degree in educational management. In revamping the Instructional Leadership unit into a PBL format, subject content of the unit was to be delivered according to principles of active, problem-solving learning. It was hoped that this would ensure that useful insights would be gained into how problem-based learning can improve the preparation of school leaders.

#### 2.4.3.1 *Definition and General Aims*

Characteristics of PBL include the following: firstly, a problem is the starting point for learning. Secondly, problems are best chosen where they conform to those existing in the workplace. Thirdly, the knowledge which students are expected to acquire during the programme is organized around problems rather than disciplines. Fourthly, students, individually and collectively, assume a major responsibility for their own instruction and learning. Finally, emphasis is placed on learning in small groups rather than on lectures ( Bridges & Hallinger 1992:5). The revamped unit has had its aims focused on increasing substantive knowledge in the area of instructional leadership , and developing a range of managerial, administrative and leadership skills and values thought important in the practice of instructional leadership.

### 2.5 SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND COGNITIVE APPRENTICESHIP

Prestine and LeGrand (1991) presented a strong case for linking cognitive learning theory to the formal preparation of educational administrators. They advocated the notions of situated cognition and cognitive apprenticeship as a way of improving the quality of administrative training programmes by placing greater emphasis on the social and cultural context in which learning takes place. Evers and Lakomski (1991) presented similar arguments from a more philosophical perspective. They used the term *isomorphism* to describe the manner in which the function of values in administrative decision making and problem-solving relate to theories of leadership and its consequences for organizational design. Thus, although leadership practices may share a similar form, they may also be composed of different intents and values from setting to setting.

Suitably training the intellect of school leaders remains the special challenge faced by institutions responsible for the preparation of leaders for future schools. In a more contemporary applied research context, Leithwood *et al* (1995) identified cognitive flexibility as a desirable trait of administrative problem-solving processes. Begley (1995) explains the key dimensions of a



cognitive apprenticeship model as including externalizing the metacognitive processes that experts usually carry out internally, situating otherwise abstract knowledge in locally relevant professional contexts of practice, and developing self-correction and self-monitoring skills.

Prestine and LeGrand's (1991) work emphasizes the creation of a cognitive apprenticeship environment within formal preparation courses, predominantly through group problem-solving exercises and other reflective activities where experts and aspirants work together to externalize processes of thought and reasoning. In the light of the foregoing, the effectiveness of principals' problem-solving strategies depends largely on the extent to which they have been exposed to formal preparatory programmes designed in such a way that due cognisance is given to the linking with precepts of cognitive apprenticeship.

## **2.6 PRINCIPALS' STRATEGIES AND TEACHERS' INSTRUCTIONAL PERFORMANCE**

Studies on principal-teacher interaction have produced some findings regarding the influence of principals' instructional leadership on classroom instruction. In a qualitative case study of effective high school principals' overall influence on teachers, Blase (1987) described several instructionally related impacts on teachers' time on task, expectations for student achievement, focus, and problem-solving orientation.

A subsequent study linked principals' leadership with teachers' consideration and tolerance for students, planning, creativity, and monitoring of student learning (Blase & Roberts, 1994). In a case study of instructional leadership, Reitzug (1994) examined the instructional leadership behaviours of one principal who provided staff development, modeled inquiry, asked questions, and encouraged risk taking. These behaviours led to teachers' greater critique of practice, teamwork with colleagues, and implementation of innovations.

Sheppard`s (1996) synthesis of existing studies on the impact of effective leaders on teachers and classroom instruction showed a positive and strong relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviours exhibited by principals and teacher commitment, professional involvement, and innovativeness. According to Blase & Blase (1999), principal behaviours associated with these effects on teachers included framing school goals, communicating school goals, supervising and evaluating instruction, coordinating the curriculum, monitoring student progress, protecting instructional time, maintaining high visibility, and providing incentives for teaching and learning.

The selection and use of these principal behaviours in the context of problem solving account for most of the influence on a teacher`s commitment, involvement, and innovativeness in the classroom. Sheppard reported that promoting a teacher`s professional development was the most influential instructional leadership behaviour at both elementary and high school levels.

From a review of models of supervision, Pajak (1993: 318) concluded that, in contrast to the common practice of instructional leadership as reinforcing specific prescribed teacher behaviour and skills, the emerging dialogue stresses classroom teaching, curriculum, staff development aspects of instructional leadership, and helping teachers discover and construct professional knowledge and skills. He also reported that in much contemporary thinking, learning is viewed as contextual and complex, teaching is based on reflective judgement, and schools are seen as democratic and learning communities.

Blase and Blase (1999) argue that despite the fact that instructional leadership has been conceptualized as collaborative in nature, the practice of instructional leadership has often been limited to one of inspection, oversight, and judgement of classroom instruction. Glanz (1995:107) argues that today`s classroom supervision is a “ bureaucratic legacy of fault finding” and uses terms such as “snoopervision” “ protective political behaviour” and “a private cold war” to characterize the field. Sergiovanni (1992: 103) refers to discussions between principals and teachers about classroom instruction as a “nonevent” - a ritual they participate in according to well-



established scripts without much consequence.

Finally, Hallinger and Heck (1996: 5) conclude that the study of instructional leadership is complex and not easily subject to empirical verification.. They further demonstrate how extant studies are methodologically limited and how power of advanced analytical treatments can be exploited. Lastly, researchers have linked principal behaviours to effects on school climates, which in turn have been shown to indirectly affect student achievement. Blase & Blase`s study (1999) describes findings about developing reflective, collaborative, problem-solving contexts for dialogue about instruction. This study further describes a specialized form of teacher thinking-reflection and reflectively informed behaviour.

## 2.6 SUMMARY

Chapter two had the purpose of reviewing literature on how problem-solving is part of the leadership process. Literature review on school improvement and effectiveness has revealed a number of characteristics of high performing schools. These characteristics include among others, producing greater student learning, and creating an orderly environment for teaching and learning. Such schools have been found to be under the leadership of highly effective principals. These are principals who are capable of having a significant influence on student learning and teachers` job satisfaction.

Research on the current state of educational leadership has revealed inadequacies on the part of educational leaders to meet current and future expectations. In view of these limitations, some researchers have shifted their attention to theories of human cognition as a better way of explaining expertise in leadership. The paucity of research on educational leaders` problem-solving was highlighted. In the final analysis the need for a more cognitively focused managerial training through a PBL approach was highlighted. The following chapter describes the methodological procedures used for the purpose of the study.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES & DATA COLLECTION**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the methodological procedures used in the study. The sample and the research design are described , followed by a section on data collection procedure.

#### **3.2 SAMPLE AND RESEARCH DESIGN**

##### **3.2.1 Sampling Technique**

A sampling technique called non-probability sampling was used where informants/respondents were selected at the discretion of the researcher. According to Koul (1984:108), non-probability sampling is convenient when the sample to be selected is very small. It also provides an opportunity for the researcher to gain insight into the problem by selecting only informed persons who can provide the maximum degree of insight into the problem with comprehensive information. Fraenkel & Wallen (1990: 76) use the terms convenience and purposive sampling where conveniently available subjects are selected for a specific purpose.

The sample for this study consisted of four (4) secondary school principals who were sampled from a population of nine (9) secondary school principals. The sample was drawn from schools located in Thabong in the Welkom District of the Free State Department of Education.

Another factor which influenced the sampling decision for this study was the unavailability of some of the secondary school principals due to leave, and the researcher saw it inappropriate to



include those occupying principalship posts in an acting capacity. As the research design of the study is qualitative, findings of this study may not be generalisable to a very large extent, but only help to describe the thoughts and feelings experienced by educational leaders and their problem-solving performance.

### **3.2.2 Research Design**

The research approach is qualitative and the method used is the descriptive method. Qualitative research describes and analyzes peoples' individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts, and perceptions ( McMillan & Schumacher 1993: 372). According to Gay (1987:189) descriptive research involves collecting data in order to answer questions concerning the current status of the phenomenon of the study, and descriptive data is collected through a questionnaire, survey, interviews or observation.

Descriptive research studies are directed toward determining the status of a situation as it exists at the time of the study (Ary *et al*, 1990: 381). The study lends itself to such an approach because it seeks to describe the problem-solving process as part of educational leadership. For the purpose of this study, a small scale survey will be conducted by using the Free Attitude Interview, described in the section below.

## **3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE**

### **3.3.1 The Interview**

The interview was regarded an appropriate data collection instrument. Interviews are appropriate in asking questions that cannot be effectively structured into a multiple choice format. Qualitative interviewing requires asking truly open-ended questions ( McMillan & Schumacher 1993). For the purpose of this study Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) were used in order to elicit responses that would clarify problem-solving performance of educational leaders and thereby lending such

responses to analysis which would determine the effectiveness of strategies used by educational leaders. The Free Attitude Interview can be described as non-directive controlled depth interview used as a verbal technique to obtain information (Meulenberg-Buskens 1997).

As this study is of a small-scale nature, all the four sampled principals were interviewed in order to identify common problems experienced and also examine the effectiveness of their problem-solving strategies. Particular attention was paid to data that bore on how the principal's problem solving strategies enhanced the culture of teaching and learning (school effectiveness). Interviews were scheduled to take place within a time frame not exceeding an hour. However, given the non-directive nature of the FAI, provision of excess in time was also made. All interviews were tape-recorded. The procedure and questions asked are presented below.

### ***3.3.1.1 Procedure***

Prior arrangements were made by seeking permission from the Free State Department of Education . After permission was granted, requests for meetings/ interview sessions with respondents were made. After meeting with the interviewee and having shared some short information about the interviewer (initial introductions), a brief ice-breaking exchange was engaged into in order to ensure that the interviewee is as comfortable as possible. This was followed by the interviewer's expression of appreciation and gratitude at the interviewee's participation and contribution towards making the study possible. All interviewees were assured of anonymity.

After outlining the frame of reference of the interview, each of the interviewees were requested to ask clarity-seeking questions. After some clarifications or absence of any clarity-seeking questions, the questions were asked in a predetermined order. Each interviewee was allowed to talk while the interviewer made use of probing to encourage more detail until saturation was reached. This was the procedure followed with every question.

### 3.3.1.2 *The Questions*

The six components of the problem-solving model (cf. 2.4.1) by Leithwood & Steinbach (1995), were used as a guide for data collection and provided an initial structure for coding and data analysis. These constructs provide the structure for reporting the results in this section; within each component, similarities and differences in the thinking of principals are described. Data from the interview was used as primary data in order to confirm earlier findings of similar research. The following questions were asked:

❶ *Problem Identification & Interpretation*

- ☛ What problems do you encounter with the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning at your school?

❷ *Goals*

- ☛ How often do you communicate school goals with your staff and learners?

❸ *Principles/Values*

- ☛ Which guiding principles or values do you use in achieving the above-mentioned goals?

❹ *Constraints*

- ☛ What would you consider as constraints/barriers/ obstacles in providing a solution to the current problem of the declining culture of teaching and learning?



⑤ *Solution Processes*

- ☛ What do you do to solve the current problem of the declining culture of teaching and learning in light of the problems you encounter, guiding principles, goals to be achieved, and constraints to be accommodated?

⑥ *Feelings/ Mood*

- ☛ How often do you experience a sense of self confidence when involved in problem-solving? Why or why not?

The analyses and the results of these questions are presented in Chapter Four (cf.4.2.1 ).

### 3.4 DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

All interview data from principals was tape recorded, transcribed and analysed for content using codes suggested by the conceptual frameworks guiding the study. Categories of responses for each research question were induced. Interpretive summaries for each research question were compiled and analysed for similarities and differences. Assistance was further sought from a colleague to validate interpretations and categories

### 3.4 SUMMARY

Chapter three described the sample and the research approach of the study. Procedures followed for data collection and analysis were outlined. The rationale for the sampling technique used was discussed and the apparent non-generalisability of the study was also highlighted and thereby pointing out the descriptive nature of the findings presented in Chapter four.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS & RESULTS OF THE STUDY

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results/ findings of the research carried out to investigate problem-solving strategies of educational leaders in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning in Thabong secondary schools. This will be done through the presentation and interpretation of data collected through interviews.

#### 4.2 THE INTERVIEWS

As indicated earlier ( cf. 3.3.1) the interviews conducted enabled the researcher to examine fundamental questions about problem-solving performance of educational leaders in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning. This section contains the results of Free Attitude Interviews with the secondary school principals of the sample concerning processes they were using to solve the problem of establishing the culture of teaching and learning. Through the use of Free Attitude Interviews, the researcher was able to elicit appropriate responses from the respondents concerning problems experienced and problem-solving strategies utilized.

##### 4.2.1 The Interview Results

The results and conclusions about the interviews are presented in this section under the headings subtitled by the questions asked. For the purpose of this study, alphabetical letters A, B, C, and D have been used to label the four sampled principals. The initial data collected from the respondents is presented in table 1 below.

**Table 1 : Principals' responses**

Questions	A	B	C	D
1. Problem Identification	Resources & lack of commitment- learners & teachers	Lack of parental involvement, low teacher and learner commitment	Drug abuse by learners and teacher shortage and lack of parental involvement	Teacher and learner discipline and shortage of resources
2. Goals	Often	Often	Often	Often
3. Principles	Concern for teachers & learners	Concern for learners	Concern for teachers & learners	Concern for teachers & learners
4. Constraints	Low teacher morale & lack of learner motivation	Leader incapacity- lack of leadership skills	Teacher anxiety & stress, age group	Teacher incapacity- inadequate professional preparation
5. Solution Processes	Consultation & Conflict management	Transparency through consultation	Consultation of all stake-holders	Collaboration with teachers & district office
6. Feelings/ Mood	Optimistic	Optimistic	Confidence & despair	Always confident

A cursory analysis of the table shows that the findings can be viewed as somewhat circumstantial. In sum there were significant similarities and differences in the practices used by principals in the establishment of the culture of teaching and learning (school improvement). In the end these practices account for the degree of confidence experienced by principals during problem-solving processes, as well as their capacity to deal with some of the constraints.

An indepth analysis of each question follows:

**Question 1: Problem Identification & Interpretation: What problems do you encounter with the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning at your school?**

The respondents indicated various types of problems encountered such as lack of both human and physical resources and behavioural problems by both teachers and learners. Three respondents cited lack of commitment on the part of both learners and teachers as the main problem experienced, and thus contributing to difficulties in the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning. Drug abuse by learners was also cited as an impediment to learning by one respondent.

**Question 2: Goals: How often do you communicate goals to teachers and learners?**

With regard to communication of goals to teachers and learners, all the respondents reported regular communication. However, they also conceded to lack of follow-up mechanisms and consistency in keeping up with the goals set in the first instance. Communication of goals is done mostly verbally during daily “morning briefings”, and written communication is kept to the minimum. Register / class teachers are then relied upon to relay any form of information which is deemed relevant to learners during register periods. Because of highly congested time-tables, principals are only able to communicate with learners once a week, during a weekly “assembly of learners”.

**Question 3: Principles/ Values: Which guiding principles or values do you use in achieving the goals of the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning?**

Three respondents cited their dominant concern for teachers and learners. They also placed great importance on fully understanding the teaching-learning programme (knowledge), being able to



take risks (courage) and encouraging participation and sharing. Leadership responsibility was also taken very seriously. As one principal said, “ My role as enabling and empowering the teacher is very clear. That does not change.” Concern for teachers` comfort was a value frequently mentioned by all the respondents. This was manifested in their desire to proceed slowly and with caution. Knowledge, respect for others, sharing and commitment were other values mentioned. Specific role responsibility was the most prevalent value which manifested itself in handing responsibility to teachers.

**Question 4: Constraints: What would you consider as constraints/ barriers/ obstacles in providing a solution to the current problem of the declining culture of teaching and learning?**

All the respondents identified quite different constraints to be overcome in solving the current problem of the declining culture of teaching and learning. These constraints vary in the degree to which they are under the control of principals. Two respondents cited low teacher morale, teacher anxiety and stress as constraints to be overcome. These constraints were further attributed to rationalization and redeployment programmes undertaken by the Department of Education.

One respondent cited lack of requisite leadership skills as an impediment due to the fact that there is no formal preparation for those assuming educational leadership roles. Age group of the current teaching corps was also cited as a handicap due to low maturity levels. Finally, inadequate professional preparation and development of teachers was reported as a constraint to the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning.

**Question 5: Solution Processes : What do you do to solve the current problem of the declining culture of teaching and learning in the light of problems you encounter, guiding principles, goals to be achieved, and constraints to be accommodated?**

Data provided by the interviews regarding solution processes provided insights less about principals' thinking than about the consequences of their thinking for action. Consultation with all stakeholders was reported by three respondents as an imperative for transparency, conflict management and resolution.

One respondent reported the importance of collaborative planning in maximizing teacher interaction. Providing time for teachers to attend conferences and workshops was the most important step this principal took. In addition to providing opportunities and encouragement, he further made the necessary arrangements for teachers to visit other schools.

**Question 6: Mood / Feelings: How often do you experience a sense of self-confidence when involved with problem solving? Why and why not?**

The following remarks demonstrate a wide range of feelings displayed by principals to being involved in the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning- from elation to resignation:

*"I really do feel blessed. They ( the staff ) are a dynamic bunch"*

*" My feelings of despair are a direct result of resistance from both teachers and learners"*

Three respondents reported high levels of optimism. Still there was some nervousness around the logistics of school improvement. One respondent was feeling uncomfortable and insecure, primarily because of his lack of knowledge of how to provide direction to staff due to high levels of resistance prevalent at his school.

In **conclusion**, problem solving processes of principals were described using a model of problem-solving consisting of six components. Substantial differences were evident among processes used by the respondents. Many of the differences in problem solving flow easily from the differences in principals' initial identification and interpretation of problems. These differences provided a

basis upon which problem-solving performance of these educational leaders in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning could be understood.

### 4.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter presented the results of this study. A description of data analysis procedure and categorization of responses to research questions was made. Finally, a synthesis of the opinions expressed by the respondents during interviews was rendered. In short the combined responses confirm the notion that leadership is an interpersonal phenomenon demonstrated in the interaction between leaders and subordinates. Effective leadership behaviour is contingent upon the leaders ability to solve complex organizational problems by circumventing impediments (constraints) to the accomplishment of organizational goals (cf.2.4.1). However, this capacity is largely dependent on the leader`s knowledge and skills accumulated through exposure and experience. Chapter Five elaborates on the findings by way of discussion, conclusion and recommendations.



## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION , CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter five includes a brief overview of the study and reports on the findings of interviews employed to gather data and thereby complement the study. The following sections- discussions, conclusions, and recommendations for future research, are supported by the results presented in Chapter four. They are formulated with consideration given to the theoretical rationale and related research of problem-solving processes of educational leaders discussed in chapters one and two, as well as methodological procedures outlined in Chapter three.

#### 5.2 OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This study was concerned with the pursuit of research agenda to unpack problem-solving processes used by educational leaders in dealing with problems around the restoration of the culture of teaching and learning in secondary schools. The main research question was: *“To what extent do problem solving strategies currently implemented by school managers enhance the culture of teaching and learning, and how can problem-solving performance of school managers be improved to ensure that a culture of learning and teaching is established in secondary schools?”*. Thus the aim of the study was to contribute towards secondary school improvement by highlighting conditions which enhance teaching and learning.

In an attempt to develop an understanding of the concept “culture of teaching and learning”, clarity was sought within the context of school improvement and effectiveness research (cf.2.2). Conceptualization of educational leadership was informed largely by review of literature on the

current state of leadership ( cf.2.3), while problem-solving as a component of educational leadership was discussed through managerial problem-solving.

As a result of inadequacies uncovered by research on the current state of educational leadership, the Problem-Based Learning Approach (cf.2.4.3) to the preparation of educational leaders was suggested as a possible solution to the problem. The notions of situated cognition and cognitive apprenticeship (cf.2.5) were also highlighted as a better way of improving educational management training programmes. The influence of principals' instructional leadership strategies on classroom instruction was also highlighted through a discussion of various studies on the subject(cf.2.6).

Finally the qualitative research of the study was discussed and interviews were conducted to realize the intended aims of the study. The qualitative data collected was presented and analysed in Chapter four. In presenting the findings of the study, generalizations from this study sample to a wider population of educational leaders is done cautiously and with concern for the sampling technique noted earlier ( cf. 3.2.1).

## **5.3 DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS**

This section focuses on the findings of the interviews.

### **5.3.1 Findings of the Interviews**

The results of the interviews indicate similarities and differences of problems encountered and problem solving strategies used by educational leaders. These similarities and differences can be subsumed under problem identification and interpretation, goals, principles/values, constraints, solution processes, and feelings/mood. All respondents conceded to the need for capacity building in order to enhance effectiveness in their practice. This is consistent with the argument presented by Prestine and LeGrand (1991) that, cognitive learning theory be linked to the formal preparation

of educational administrators (cf.2.5).

#### ***5.3.1.1 Problem Identification & Interpretation***

Shortage of both human and physical resources was identified as an impediment to the realization of the culture of teaching and learning. Physical resource shortage could be attributed to laxity on the part of the Department of Education in making the necessary provisioning. This could also be attributed to educational leaders' lack of initiative in generating and properly managing funds. Shortage of human resources could also be attributed to redeployment and voluntary severance packages introduced recently as part of human resource management and rationalization process by the Department of Education.

Low levels of commitment on the part of teachers and learners is directly linked to behavioural problems encountered by educational leaders on a daily basis. Lack of participation by parents in school matters has also been raised as a point of concern. These problems could be attributed largely to loose organizational structures in schools where stipulations in school policy documents are not well accentuated, and also where these stipulations are denied practical enforcement. Low practical application of school policy documents hampers realization of school goals, and thereby rendering some schools dysfunctional in some instances. In order to circumvent this scenario, Odden (1995: 176) argues for the devolution of power and knowledge at the school level to ensure more teacher involvement and accountability in school management. In this way schools will be transformed into high performance entities (cf.2.2).

#### ***5.3.1.2 Goals***

Setting and communication of goals has been identified as an important educational leadership activity, and this was conceded to by all the respondents. This is consistent with research undertaken by Edmonds (1982) in which it was found that more effective schools had clear



academic goals and held high expectations for learners. However, problems identified above (cf.5.3.1.1) have a tendency to make the achievement of the set goals a very tedious task. In response to this murky scenario, educational leaders need to invest time and money in strategic planning sessions and also consider seeking assistance of external agencies and institutions. Teachers and learners need to be afforded opportunities to attend workshops and seminars where issues pertinent to strategic planning are discussed.

#### **5.3.1.3      *Principles/ Values***

Differences in the values and principles guiding solutions to the school improvement problem are reflected in the respondents' concerns either for learners or teachers, and in some instances, concern for both. These concerns stem from the strife to create a more conducive teaching and learning environment. This is further corroborated by one of the characteristics of effective schools identified by Edmond (1982), namely, a safe and orderly climate to teaching and learning. However, the creation of such an environment is largely contingent upon the management style of the principal. All the respondents conceded to the need to democratize school governance and also work towards ways of improving parental involvement. In this way, constraints identified below, would be minimized.

#### **5.3.1.4      *Constraints***

Low teacher morale, teacher anxiety and stress, teacher incapacity, and lack of motivation on the part of learners have been identified as some of the major challenges facing educational leaders. This unsavoury scenario could be alleviated by creating more opportunities for collegial interaction through workshops and conferences.

Inadequate professional development of educational leaders remains one of the key concerns of the respondents. This is consistent with the earlier findings of research undertaken by Leithwood *et al* (1995), where problem-solving depends largely on how knowledgeable the principal

considers himself to be with instructional practice. Such incapacity is a major constraint to the realization of school improvement. Hence all the respondents expressed themselves in favour of capacity building programmes for educational leaders.

#### **5.3.1.5      *Solution Processes***

Democratic principles such as transparency, consultation, and collaboration are relied upon in the solution of problems. However, creation of viable school governance structures which are in regular contact remains a prerogative for solution of school related problems. The educational leader as a central force to the solution of such problems needs to be well-grounded in matters of conflict management and resolution, because conflict is bound to feature during interaction of people from diverse backgrounds and experience, such as learners, teachers , and parents.

In improving the actual teaching-learning process, all the respondents conceded to the need to install stricter control measures in the assessment of the teaching process, such as occasional classroom visits. Parent -teacher consultation meetings were also identified as the key to the solution of learner behavioural problems, and also fostering co-operation between teachers and parents. In this way respondents hoped to have their confidence as educational leaders restored.

#### **5.3.1.6      *Feelings/ Mood***

Feelings and moods play a significant role in the solution of problems in human interaction. This study found that such feelings and moods ranged from elation to despair/ resignation among the respondents. These were largely dependent upon the level of resistance and conflict experienced by educational leaders in their daily interaction with their subordinates.

The higher the level of resistance, the less confident educational leaders felt about their capacity to solve problems; and conversely, the lesser the level of resistance, the more confident they felt about their problem-solving capacity. In order to minimize conflict and resistance, all respondents

conceded to the need to create a more collegial working environment founded on professional principles, and always strive to rise above “petty personal differences”.

In **conclusion**, the foregoing findings are consistent with the findings of earlier research on school improvement and effectiveness, as well as problem-solving processes of educational leaders. Sheppard`s(1996) synthesis of existing studies on the impact of effective leaders on teachers and classroom instruction showed a strong relationship between effective instructional leadership behaviours and teacher commitment (cf.2.6).

## **5.4 IMPLICATIONS OF THE RESULTS**

Based on the results of this study, it has become evident that in order to address some of the challenges educational leaders are facing, it is imperative to consider the need for capacity building. The fact that most secondary schools are fraught with behavioural problems among educators and learners suggests that there has been considerable neglect of educational management preparation programmes to equip school managers with the necessary skills for conflict management and resolution.

In the light of the foregoing, the need for managerial capacity building has become imperative in helping to ensure that school managers are in the position to cope with their changing role as educational leaders. Such an opinion is consistent with Dimmock & Edwards` (1996) proposal for the implementation of Problem-Based Learning (PBL) Approach for a unit in a specialised master`s degree in educational management (cf.2.4.3).

The need for capacity building for school managers has always existed due to the promotion of educators into management positions without prior managerial experience and the dearth of in-service training programmes. Educational management training and subsequent certification on completion of the course will imbue prospective school mangers with the necessary skills and confidence to execute their tasks efficiently.



Preparation for school leadership and management has been on the education agenda for many years. The focus on management and administration has been driven largely by the perceived correlation between high quality management and effective schools. Steyn (1993: 360) states that management training is essential because educational management is a critical determinant of educational quality. Thus, inadequate understanding of leadership in the field of education leads to ineffective practice and unbalanced approaches to educational leadership.

In South Africa there has been increasing awareness of the need to develop management capacity in education. At the policy level, much has been written recently about restructuring the educational bureaucracy and the need to improve managerial performance as a whole (NEPI, 1992; ANC, 1993; Fehnel *et. al.*, 1993; Department of Education, 1994). These documents do not spell out policies for supporting the professional development of school managers and there is very little theoretical work on management development in South Africa. Although professional development for aspiring school managers has been on the education agenda for many years, what is considered appropriate preparation for school management depends on the contemporary perception of what the tasks of school manager are.

The last few decades produced a large volume of research undertaken on management and most modern institutions provide for management training for potential managers in their ranks. Research in South Africa has shown an evolutionary change in the task of the school manager from a pedagogic-didactic task towards a management task for which teacher training has not equipped him. However, problem-solving remains at the heart of management tasks. Thus, efforts towards initiating preparation programmes for educational leaders should include consideration of the Problem-Based Learning programme ( cf 2.4.3).

Appointments to managerial positions on the basis of classroom performance have exposed an acute lack of readiness to assume responsibilities integral to such positions. Consequent to this has

been chaotic incidents with some principals abdicating their duties. One of the cardinal questions facing the researcher is: “ To what extent, and in what precise ways, do our graduate leadership training programmes prepare individuals to deal with the realities of leadership?”. The need for specialized management training cannot be underestimated. A total management development programme should be instituted for the implementation of national education management policy. An educational management certificate should be seriously considered as a pre-requisite for appointment to a management post. Entry into administration should therefore require more than perseverance and time served; it should be the preserve of the best, most well prepared and creative people in the field of education.

In a developing country like South Africa much still has to be done to enhance professional development of school managers. Formal university courses are not sufficient to provide for the ever-increasing demand for managerial skills. In-service educational programmes which may adopt various forms will have to be introduced on a regular basis to satisfy the needs of educational managers. Important too, is the need to develop a theory based on educational management which takes account of the changing realities in the South African context, particularly the changing role of school managers and other management staff.

Better trained school managers will result in more effective schools with minimal governance problems. Collaboration between government departments, non-governmental organizations, and institutions of higher learning is imperative for quality provisioning of educational management training. Although there is consensus on the deficiency of current educational management training programmes, there is no agreement on the actual form and content of programmes to equip school managers for the future. This scholarly debate among researchers provides a basis upon which further research can be conducted.

## 5.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The following suggestions are made for future research on aspects of concern in the enhancement of problem-solving performance of secondary school principals. As this study aimed at investigating problem-solving strategies used by principals to enhance the culture of teaching and learning, interview results provided less insights about principals' thinking, and more about consequences of their thinking for action.

Much of how principals thought about the culture of teaching and learning flowed from different interpretations which could be accounted for by different school contexts. However, these interpretations seemed to depend more on how knowledgeable each principal considered himself to be on matters of teaching and learning. Subsequent research would do well to attend, more explicitly, to domain-specific knowledge in principals' problem-solving.

The restructuring of South African society into a democratic and non-racist existence, has had far reaching implications for educational thought and practice. Some of these implications include state driven initiative to restore the culture of teaching and learning and thereby creating more effective schools. However, school effectiveness and improvement are subjects of debate among different scholars and researchers. In an international survey on examining the interrelationships between school effectiveness research and school improvement practice, Reynolds in Dimmock (1995:186) found that school effectiveness researchers are failing to generate knowledge that is relevant to the school improvement enterprise in the following specific ways:

- ① school effectiveness studies are deficient at the level of process rather than factors, since effectiveness researchers have considerably more experience at the level of school organizational factors
- ② school improvement needs to be informed by knowledge as to what conditions



outside the level of the school are necessary to generate process or outcome improvement- currently school effectiveness research tends to generate knowledge only about school-level variables.

- ③ school improvement research needs to refocus its activities away from the level of the school to that of the classroom if it is to generate the possibility of increased school outcomes and if it is to generate knowledge of use to the school effectiveness enterprise.

In the light of the foregoing, it is evident that there is a need for consensus among researchers and practitioners in order to eventually create viable institutions of learning. Further research on the changing role of the educational leader as instructional leader is required. Although not necessarily the main aim of this study, it is the opinion of the researcher that in addition to problem-solving capacity, instructional leadership also goes a long way in enhancing the culture of teaching and learning.

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## APPENDIX A

4<sup>th</sup> January 2000

The Head: Free State Dept. of Educ. & Culture  
P.O. Box 521  
BLOEMFONTEIN  
300

Dear Sir

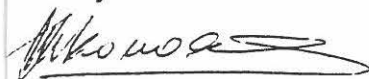
### REQUEST FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH IN SCHOOLS

, the undersigned and an M.Ed student at Vista University - Welkom Campus, hereby request  
or permission to conduct research studies at some of the schools under your jurisdiction in the  
Welkom District.

A comprehensive summary of the findings of the research will be provided to the department.  
I also wish to emphasise that I will abide by all conditions pertaining to the task of conducting  
research in the schools as stipulated by the department; and will undertake not to pass any  
information to the mass media without prior arrangement with the department.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Sincerely



Mr MJ Nkonoane



Promoter: Dr DK Selaledi